

Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Scarlet Robin

Photo – Noel Young

An influx of brood parasites – and a request for observations By Chris Timewell

There seems to be a very high number of cuckoo individuals that have migrated into the region this Spring, particularly the Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*) and Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx basalis*), and to a lesser extent the Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cuculus flabelliformis*) and Shining Bronze-cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx lucidus*). I've only been living in central Victoria since mid-2008, and so I don't have many other years to make a decent comparison. However, other longer term residents that I've spoken to have also noted the current cuckoo influx this year.

I suspect most people who are not associated with field naturalist clubs or bird-watching clubs are unaware that Australia has true cuckoo species. They've all seen cuckoos having their eggs hatched and chick's raised by other bird species on an Attenborough documentary, but assume that this a Northern Hemisphere phenomena. They are often shocked to learn behaviour such as this could be occurring in the bush reserve down the end of their road, or even in their backyard!

I'm very interested to know which bird species are being parasitized by the cuckoos in our local area. If you see another bird species raising a cuckoo chick this season within the Mount Alexander shire, could you send me an email to let me know which species is the suffering parent (c_timewell@hotmail.com). And, if you can work it out, could you also let me know the species' identity of cuckoo chick? Cuckoo chicks can be difficult to tell apart between species, particularly when not long out of the nest, but most field guides provide useful identifying features. I'll compile all the results at the completion of the breeding season, and provide them in a future Castlemaine Naturalist newsletter. Any local observations that you can send me of cuckoos being raised by other birds in previous years would also be very welcome.

According to the Slater field guide, the nests of following native birds are most likely to be parasitized by these cuckoos.

Pallid Cuckoo – mainly parasitizes cup-shaped nests of honeyeaters, flycatchers, orioles, magpie-larks, etc.

Fan-tailed Cuckoo – mainly parasitizes dome-shaped nests of scrubwrens, warblers and wrens

Horsfields Bronze-cuckoo – parasitizes both dome-shaped and cup-shaped nests, particularly wrens, thornbills and robins

Shining Bronze-cuckoo – parasitizes mainly dome-shaped nests of warblers, thornbills and scrubwrens.



One of the many invaders – a Pallid Cuckoo
- photo Noel Young

There's also a possibility that you might see a Black-eared Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx osculans*) in the local area on rare occasions. Surprisingly, another type of cuckoo called the Common Koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*) was heard calling near the Castlemaine Train Station earlier this year – but to the best of my knowledge it has not been recorded in the area before or since. The Koel typically occurs much further north in the forests of eastern and northern Australia, although there have been a small but increasing number of Victorian records in recent years.

Wednesday Wildflower Wander #3

Railway Crossing, Sinclair's Lane 3/10

Rita Mills

Again this year this spot has been a mass of wildflowers. The dominating ones this year were Rabbit-ears *Thelymitra antennifera*, and Wax-lip Orchids *Glossodia major* were a close second.

This year we drove down to the crossing and concentrated on the area each side of the railway line. The following is the list of plants in flower – (I have used common names only for plants listed in the two previous WWWs.)

Musk Caladenia *Caladenia gracilis*, Hooded Caladenia *C. cucullata*, Pink Fingers *C. carnea*, Wax-lip Orchid, **Rabbit-ears *Thelymitra antennifera*, Crimson Sun-orchid *T. x macmillanii***, Scented Sun-orchid *T. megcalyptra*, Bearded Greenhood *Pterostylis* sp. aff. *plumosa*, Purplish Beard-orchid *Calochilus robertsonii*, Slender Rice-flower, Small Veronica *Veronica* sp., Golden Moths, Downy Grevillea, **Small-flowered Grevillea *G. micrantha* (this species is a special one, only being found in this particular form here and near Wedderburn)**, Common Everlasting *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* sp. agg., Pink Bells, Rough, and Gold-dust Wattles, Gorse Bitter-pea, Common Beard-heath *Leucopogon virgatus*, Tall Sundew, Milkmaids *Burchardia umbellata*, Fairy Wax, Billy Buttons, Many-flowered Mat-rush *Lomandra multiflorus*, Common Fringe-myrtle *Calytrix tetragona*, Yam Daisy, Tangled Guinea-flower *Hibbertia exutiacies*, Purple Coral-pea.



Bearded Greenhood
Pterostylis sp affin *plumosa*



Small flowered Grevillea
Grevillea micrantha



Rabbit-ears
Thelymitra antennifera

Photos – Noel Young

Wednesday Wildflower Wander #4

Peelers Road, Barkers Creek 10/10

Rita Mills

We visited this area some four or five years ago, before the end of the drought, and the most noticeable thing was that there's a lot more shrubs now. It was very open then, and now the Grey Everlasting is very much in evidence, so much so that I wasn't too sure where I was at times.

Highlight of the afternoon would have to be a small clump of *Diuris*, which we finally decided had to be a hybrid. Smallish and rather dainty, it seemed to have some characteristics of both Leopard (*D pardina*) and Tiger (*D sulphurea*) Orchids, though the problem with that is that they are not usually in flower at the same time.

Our list for the walk:

Gold-dust, Spreading, Golden and Rough Wattles, Sweet Bursaria, Gorse Bitter-pea, Tall Sundew, Downy Grevillea, Many-flowered Mat-rush, Murnong, or Yam Daisy, Grey Everlasting, Button Everlasting *Coronidium scorpioides* just coming into flower, Fairy Wax-flower, Slender Rice-flower, Common Beard-heath, White

Marianth, Pink Bells, Sticky Everlasting, *Diuris* hybrid, Leopard Orchid, Purplish Beard-orchid, Pink Fingers *Caladenia carnea* this time, Musk Caladenia, Hooded Caladenia, Wax-lip Orchid, Rabbit-ears.



Hybrid *Diuris*, Peelers rd. Photo – Noel Young

Forest Defoliation – Again?

Chris Timewell

If you have recently driven between Castlemaine and Daylesford, or from Malmsbury across to Guildford, you will have seen the vast swaths of forest looking extremely sick. At first I thought that maybe it was to do with the control burns. But, on closer inspection, there were hundreds of caterpillars happily devouring the foliage. So many questions came to mind. What species are these caterpillars? Where had they come from? Why aren't the birds controlling them? Will the forests ever recover from this widespread devastation?

By coincidence, I then stumbled across an article written by Terry Collins in the November 1985 edition of the Castlemaine Naturalist. Not only did it help me to identify the current defoliating culprit, but it also suggested that this broad-scale event has occurred before. Terry wrote:

"In the September [1985] issue of the Castlemaine Naturalist you would have seen the article on Common Insect Pests of Trees wherein was the mention of Cup Moths. A drive around the bush and you will see evidence of their dastardly work, with trees literally defoliated by the score. Our lovely gums are suffering and look pathetic. I have killed thousands of the larvae as they crawl up and down the trunks. So bad is the infestation that nearly all of the birds have deserted us. No Thornbills, Wrens, Fantails or Honeyeaters; only Parrots nesting, 3 or 4 Wattlebirds and only 2 White-faced Honeyeaters. Even the Currawong Family with their one nestling has gone, and the usual nesting by thornbills has not taken place. All is caused by the Cup Moth larvae I think. Sadly these pests do not seem to have any predators, although about eight years ago when there was a minor infestation, about 20 crows camped in our trees for about a fortnight, feeding on the larvae as they crawled up and down the boughs."

I don't have copies of the immediately previous issues of the Castlemaine Naturalist, or the subsequent ones. However, in the next issue that I do have (April 1986), our current President, Rita Mills, talks more about the Cup Moth infestation of the previous year:

"After the damage done by millions of Cup Moth (Stinging Joeys, Chinese Junks) caterpillars last year, it's quite alarming to see the number of moths swarming around the lights now. At least if they lay their patches of woolly eggs on my house or on the window the larvae won't survive, but there must still be millions laid on the trees. This time I have seen small swarms of them milling and circling around in one spot, which is certainly something I have not seen before, despite living on the edge of the bush all my life. Hopefully weather conditions will be unfavourable to them. It's the only way that I can think of that would control them."



The Cup Moth larvae on a trail post in Browns Gully 16/9/12. Massive defoliation was evident along the Porcupine Ridge road, and hundreds of the critters were seen in the area. - Ed. Photo – Noel Young

Pudding Bag Lane Nature Reserve 13/10/12

Rita Mills

How could anyone resist a visit to a place with a name like that? And it proved to be a great place for wildflowers. Unfortunately, sometime in the past someone has thought it was a great place to dump their rubbish, but this was just a small area alongside the track which was the continuation of the road.

Elsewhere there were all sorts of treasures to be found. Some of the group spread into the adjoining property, while others of us went down into the gully towards the back of the reserve. Even those who pottered around near where we parked the cars found lots to interest them.

I find that I got so enthusiastic about finding things that I'm pretty sure that my list of plants in flower is incomplete. In the gully we found Common Bird-orchids *Chiloglottis valida*, Tall Greenhoods *Pterostylis melagramma*, a couple of Waxlip Orchids *Glossodia major*, and both the pink and the white form of Common Heath, *Epacris impressa*. On the ridge-tops the outstanding plant to my way of thinking was the Prostrate Flat-pea *Platylobium montanum* ssp. *prostratum* which virtually blocked our way for quite a distance.

My rather restricted plant list reads – Thin-leaf Wattle (lots, and very attractive) *Acacia aculeatissima*, Hedge Wattle *A. paradoxa*, Chocolate Lily *Arthropodium strictum*, Milkmaids *Burchardia umbellata*, Pink Fingers *Caladenia carnea*, Heath Milkwort *Comesperma ericinum*, Narrow-leaf Bitter-pea *Daviesia leptophylla*, Black-anther Flax Lily *Dianella admixta* (flowering just starting), Bushy Parrot Pea *Dillwynia ramosissima*, Tall Sundew *Drosera peltata* ssp. *auriculata*, Common Heath, Waxlip Orchid, Primrose Goodenia *G. blackiana*, Downy Grevillea *G. alpina*, Purple Coral-pea *Hardenbergia violacea* (almost finished), Variable Sword-sedge *Lepidosperma laterale*, Common Beard-heath *Leucopogon virgatus*, Fairy Wax-flower *Philothea verrucosa*, Slender Rice-flower *Pimelea linifolia*, Prostrate Flat-pea, Tall Greenhood, Pink-bells *Tetratheca ciliata*, Gorse (at the rubbish dump area) *Ulex europaeus*, Early Nancy *Wurmbea dioica*. Richard had a much more impressive list boosted by another visit on the Sunday – it's that sort of place. You get the urge to go back again! The only birds I recorded were a flock of Choughs and a White-throated Tree-creeper.



Prostrate Flat-pea
Platylobium montanum ssp. *prostratum*



Bird Orchid *Chiloglottis valida*

Photos – Noel Young

Wednesday Wildflower Wander #5

Centre Road Bushland Reserve, Muckleford 17/10

List by Richard Piesse:

<i>Arthropodium strictum</i>	Chocolate Lily
<i>Burchardia umbellata</i>	Milkmaids
<i>Caladenia carnea</i>	Pink Fingers
“ <i>cucullata</i>	Hood Orchid
“ <i>gracilis</i>	Musky Hood
<i>Calochilus robertsonii</i>	Purple Beard-orchid
<i>Glossodia major</i>	Wax-lip Orchid
<i>Thelymitra antennifera</i>	Rabbit-ears
“ <i>ixioides</i>	Spotted Sun-orchid
“ <i>pauciflora</i>	Slender “
“ <i>rubra</i>	Salmon “

<i>Craspedia variabilis</i>	Billy Buttons
<i>Microseris</i> sp 3	Yam Daisy
<i>Ozothamnus obcordatus</i>	Grey Everlasting
<i>Xerochrysum viscosum</i>	Sticky Everlasting
<i>Wahlenbergia stricta</i>	Bluebell
<i>Stackhousia monogyna</i>	Creamy Candles
<i>Hibbertia exutiacies</i>	Spiky Guinea-flower
<i>Hibbertia incana</i>	Hoary Guinea-flower
<i>Drosera peltata</i> ssp <i>auriculata</i>	Tall Sundew
<i>Brachyloma daphnoides</i>	Daphne Heath
<i>Daviesia ulicifolia</i>	Gorse Bitter-pea
<i>Dillwynia sericea</i>	Showy Parrot-pea
<i>Hardenbergia violacea</i>	Purple Coral-pea
<i>Gonocarpus tetragynus</i>	Common Raspwort
<i>Bursaria spinosa</i> ssp <i>spinosa</i>	Sweet Bursaria
<i>Grevillea alpina</i>	Downy Grevillea
<i>Veronica plebeia</i>	Trailing Speedwell
<i>Philothea verrucosa</i>	Fairy Wax-flower
<i>Thysanotus patersonii</i>	Twining Fringe-lily
<i>Juncus remotiflorus</i>	Diffuse Rush
<i>Acacia acinacea</i>	Gold-dust Wattle
<i>Acacia aspera</i>	Rough Wattle



Beard-orchid and Pink Fingers

Photos – Noel Young

A reminder and call for volunteers for the Annual Bird Count

to be held this year on **Saturday December 1st**

Each year we form teams of 3 or 4 to cover areas which don't overlap

Meet to start at 8am at the Duke st. car park

If you can help please contact **Chris Morris** on 0418 996289

What happened to the Swifties?

Noel Young

The Swift Parrots were sighted briefly in April this year (30 at Muckleford) and then disappeared from the district. Birds Australia reports that as in 2009, they moved up the NSW coast where this year “unprecedented numbers” have been sighted, and very few in Victoria. Here, a lack of flowering Eucalypts, and also low numbers of lerps had induced their departure for better pastures.

In August, more than a thousand were seen in a square kilometre of the Bodalla State Forest south of Moruya, the “largest single congregation of Swift Parrots recorded in living memory!” They stayed for a few days then appeared to split up and head to foraging spots along the coast. Around 300 were also resident in the Hunter valley where they were found with good numbers of Regent Honeyeaters in areas of abundant Spotted Gum flowering. The recent change of climate seems to be benefiting these endangered birds.

Observations

- ◆ A bird call (during the night) was played from a phone recording, and identified as a Horsefield's Bronze-cuckoo.
- ◆ Chris Timewell remarked on the unusual abundance of Cuckoos, and on the the widespread leaf attack on parts of the forest, apparently by Cup Moth larvae.
- ◆ Penny reported a sighting of a Hobby on the corner of Berkeley and Barkers st. 10 days before the meeting.
- ◆ A discussion on the problem of Indian Mynahs brought the suggestion that they dislike loud noise. Banging rubbish bin lids together is said to be effective. They had been seen evicting Rosellas from nest boxes
- ◆ Sighted a **Painted Honeyeater** at the Fryerstown cemetery on Monday October 8. Geoff Park has them nesting near Newstead late October. On the same day I found a male Mistletoe Bird (and a male Scarlet Robin – cover photo) at Manchester Reef. As well as cuckoos there seems to be an abundance of Rufous Whistlers lately – Noel Young
- ◆ Rita remarked that both Crested Pigeons and Red capped Robins arrived in this area during the 1982 drought
- ◆ Returned to Fryerstown cemetery on October 16. No sign of the Painted Honeyeaters, but found species I didn't see the previous week – Dusky Woodswallow, Jacky Winter, White-winged Triller and Olive backed Oriole – Noel Young

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

November 2012

Fri November 9 meeting: Speaker: Damien Cook on
the Wetlands of the Victorian Volcanic Plains

Sat November 10 field trip: Blackwood with Richard Piesse
*NB starting time **10 am** from the usual place

Sat December 1 Annual Bird Count – contact Chris Morris

Fri December 14 meeting: Members night

Members' "Show and Tell". Share a few photos, a nature experience, a poem - be as creative as you like. Slide and digital projector, laptop available for use (powerpoint or jpegs on a CD or USB key should work)
UCA Hall, 7.30 pm. Bring a plate of supper to share

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 7.30 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2012

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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